

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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The God Who Sees

Charles Fry

When Abram was seventy-five years old, he left most of his family behind and went to Canaan, as God had commanded him (**Genesis 12:1-5**). After spending some time camping from place to place in Canaan, Abram and his group went into Egypt for awhile because there was famine in the region (**Genesis 12:10-13:1**). After some time in Egypt Abram returned to Canaan, richer in livestock and servants than he had been before. One of the servants probably acquired in Egypt was a young woman named Hagar who belonged to Abram's wife, Sarai (**Genesis 16:1**).

About ten years after Abram had first come to Canaan, his wife, Sarai, proposed that they should build a family through the Egyptian servant woman, Hagar, since they had no children of their own. God had promised Abram offspring (**Genesis 12:2, 15:4-6**), but after such a long time the conclusion that Sarai would never bear a child, already being seventy-five years old, seemed certain. So Abram and Sarai decided to accomplish God's promise in their own way (as many believers have attempted over the centuries). Soon, Hagar was pregnant with Abram's child, a boy who would be born when Abram was eighty-six years old (**Genesis 16:16**).

Unfortunately, as often happens when people determine to accomplish God's promises by their own devices, things quickly became difficult in Abram's household, with complications that never went away (even to this day). As soon as Hagar was pregnant with Abram's heir, she imagined that her position in the household would change, as indeed it would have in many households of that era (**Genesis 16:4**), and she thought she would rise above her mistress. Sarai complained to Abram about Hagar's changed attitude, blaming him, and he in turn effectively washed his hands of the matter, telling Sarai, "Your slave is in your hands, do with her whatever you think best." Consequently, Sarai treated Hagar badly, and Hagar fled the household (**Genesis 16:6**).

When Hagar ran away from Sarai, she encountered the Lord's angel by a spring, a water well, in a remote area (**Genesis 16:7-14**). As often happens in Biblical accounts of such divine encounters, the angel made it plain he knew all about her, identifying her by name and household, but nevertheless asking her where she had come from and where she was going. Hagar promptly admitted that she was a runaway slave. What happened next may seem quite odd to the

"modern" reader, as the Lord commanded Hagar to go home "to your mistress and submit to her." Few counselors today would urge someone to return to an abusive master, but God has unwaveringly called upon his people to be humble, meek, respectful, and submissive in obedience to Him. Christians are called to submission to other believers (**Ephesians 5:21**), wives submitting to their own husbands (**Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 3:1-6**), submission to ruling authorities (**Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17**), and slaves submitting to their masters (**Ephesians 6:5-8**), even harsh masters (**1 Peter 2:18-21**). Such submission is a persistent principle of godly living, exemplified most dramatically and thoroughly by Jesus himself (**1 Peter**

Unlike the gods of Egypt where she was born, the Lord paid attention to ordinary people like Hagar, cared about her personally, and had plans and purposes for her and her progeny.

2:21-25). Contrary to a common theme of our contemporary sensibilities, contrary to Hagar's own wishes, she was to go back to Sarai, and submit to her who had been harsh. Doing so would ensure that her son would be born in his father's household, and despite all appearances to the contrary, it was her own best choice.

When the Lord's angel spoke to Hagar at the well, he promised a multitude of descendants through the son she would soon give birth to (**Genesis 16:9-12**) and directed her to name the boy "Ishmael" which means "God hears," because "God has heard of your misery." This must have been quite startling to Hagar, that the Lord was paying attention to her, listening to her, cared about her, and was making promises to her. Hagar expressed her surprise and delight that God took notice of her, a runaway slave with no resources, by calling the Lord "the God who sees me" (**Genesis 16:13-14**) and naming the well where the Lord spoke to her "the well of the Living One who sees me." Unlike the gods of Egypt where she was born, the Lord paid attention to ordinary people like Hagar, cared about her personally, and had plans and purposes for her and her

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progeny.

Hagar did as the Lord directed, went home and bore Abram a son, who was given the name "Ishmael" by Abram (**Genesis 16:15**). One thing this naming tells us is that Hagar told Abram of her conversation with the angel, and Abram believed it. Abram gave the boy the name God had given to Hagar.

Centuries after the time of Abram and Hagar, David wrote, "God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God" (**Psalms 53:2**). In fact, the consistent testimony of the Bible is that the all-seeing Creator pays attention to everything and everyone all the time in all of creation. **Psalm 139** especially highlights that God knows each of us before we are born, is present everywhere we go, and knows everything we do. He is not a God far off, but a God constantly observing and interacting with the cosmos he made, including every person everywhere (note also **Matthew 6:1-6**).

Two thousand years after Abram and Hagar, and a thousand years after David, Jesus encountered another woman at another well, a story recounted in **John 4**. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus, like the angel in **Genesis 16**, asked her questions he already knew the answer to. Talking with Jesus she concluded that he was God's chosen one because he "told me everything I ever did" (**John 4:29**). Like Hagar the Egyptian slave before her, this Samaritan woman realized that the "God who sees me" knew her, and cared about her, and sought her out so that she might also know him.

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Who Will You Be?

Blake Stanley

Who are you now compared to who you were 10 years ago? You are different. Sure, there are a lot of similarities but you have changed. You have experienced events that have changed you. You have made decisions that have made you a different person. Speaking for myself, 10 years ago, I had no kids. Today, I have four. Along the way I have buried several family members and experienced the sudden and unexpected loss of a dear friend. In no way are my experiences unique. You too have experienced joy and pain. We cannot have those experiences without change.

In what ways have we changed? Have we grown in our faith or have we regressed? The answer is the result of decisions we made along the way. It is true, events do shape us, but ultimately how they shape us is up to us. The same event can shake our faith or make it stronger. It can break us down or

build us up. It can cause bitterness or it can expand our capacity of finding joy in all of life's trials. The difference is in our response.

There is some value in looking back at life this way. Self-reflection can be revealing. Think of Solomon in **Ecclesiastes**, David after Nathan exposed his sin, Saul on the Damascus road. We see these moments of reflection in their lives. Solomon writing the book of **Ecclesiastes**. David writing **Psalm 51**. Saul presumably reflecting on what he had done and what he would do as he sat blind, not drinking or eating for three days (see **Acts 9:9**). Like these men, by reflecting in this way, we can see the opportunities we missed, the things we need to improve upon, the time well spent or ill spent, the mistakes made and lessons learned. The value of reflection is realized when we allow it to change how we act going forward. We are who we are today. We cannot change the choices of the past that brought us to the present. What we can do is work to mold who we will be in the future.

Regardless of where we find ourselves today, we continually have the responsibility to change. In **Ephesians 4**, as Paul outlines the work of the church, he says the church works together, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (**verse 13**). God expects us to change. He has given us the unattainable aim of reaching the measure of Christ. To work with each other and His Spirit to create a metamorphosis of our habits, our actions, our thoughts and even our character. To be *more* like Christ. That is our aim from the moment we commit to Christ to the moment we go to meet him.

Our work towards this goal does not only impact ourselves. Our growth is not meant for ourselves. We are to grow so that we are better equipped to equip others for the work of the church, which is to equip the saints. God provided a cycle of growth within the church. When I was a youth in Christ, there were those who I leaned on. They worked to ground me in the faith. They helped to provide what was needed for me to mature, grow, remain faithful, and they were there to help me when I strayed and failed. I would expect all of us had those people in our lives, and God expects us all to grow, so we can fill that role for another person. Each stage of life offers us opportunities to help build up those around us.

Growth for this work does not happen without active work on our part. We have to want to change. We have to look at the challenges life brings us as opportunities to grow. Not just the tragic events in our life. Those have a way of sharpening our senses, focusing our attention and drawing us closer to the Lord. What about the other times when things are going well? How do we take advantage of the relatively calm times to grow?

The Psalmist of **Psalm 1** paints the picture of a man who delights in and meditates upon the law of Lord as a tree planted

by the waters, continually drawing on the strength the word provides. Paul instructed Timothy to “*give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*” (1 **Timothy 4:13**). Making time for those moments when we can open up the word and pray to the Lord is so critical. With each moment of attention, we are further building on our faith. Over the course of years, the continual attention to and drawing on the word add up to large amounts of time in study and prayer. It will transform us closer to Christ and make a difference in our ability to work in the Lord's body.

If the Lord continues to bless you with life, who will you be ten years from now? It is an impossible question to answer, but what we do know is that ten years from now we will be the product of our experiences and - more so - of the decisions we made along the way. We should keep that in mind as we make decisions and face the trials of this life.

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The Two Most Important Verses

Jay Graham

What if you were asked the question, “What do you think are the two most important verses in the Bible?” What would you say? I realize this is a subjective question to be sure, and the answer depends on a number of factors. It is definitely a matter of perspective. There are a number of verses you might consider.

I was recently asked to present a lesson on this question by a congregation. It really made me think. Some might say **Acts 2:38** is one. Some might consider **Psalm 46:10** is one. One might consider **Romans 5:1** as another. Another verse to consider might be **Romans 8:1**. You could consider **2 Thessalonians 1:8**. Obviously there are many that could qualify based on many valid thoughts. After some consideration I came up with two verses that I think might qualify.

Consider **Genesis 1:1**: “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” I think this verse sets the stage and is the perfect introduction to the Bible. It does not try to convince one that God exists by showing evidences and other proofs. It simply states God as a fact. It presents God as the Creator of all things. It is worth mentioning this was one of Paul's points as he was attempting to introduce the Lord as our Creator in **Acts 17:22-23** to those philosophers at Mars Hill.

For my second verse, consider **John 3:16**, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” When one considers this verse with the first verse it simply teaches what

that same Creator did for man. And it is worth mentioning this thought was used by Paul as he concluded the above noted discussion at Mars Hill in **Acts 17:30-31** as he referenced this same Son.

To be sure, we do need all the Scriptures, and I am not trying to diminish the rest of God's Word. If one only had access to these two verses, they would need more information to help them pursue this Creator and the Son He gave to the world. However, if one considered these two verses in earnest, they would indeed lead to one searching for more information. I just thought it was an interesting exercise as we consider God's glorious message to His most precious and beloved of His creations.

What do YOU think are the two most important verses in the Bible?

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Glory to God!

The church in **Excelsior Springs, MO** rejoiced when **Autumn Seek, Desmond “Desi” Seek, and Draven Seek** were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ on January 1.

The church in **Pleasant Hill, IA** welcomed **Joe “J.C.” and Melanie Castro** as members of the congregation.

The church in **Vandalia, IA** praised God when **Delana Lewis** was buried with Christ.

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:4-7).

Blessed Are the Dead

Sean Dale White, 49, of Paducah, KY was tragically killed in a traffic accident on November 25, 2019. He was born February 6, 1970. Sean was a member of **Central Church of Christ in Paducah**, where he served as a deacon. He leaves behind his wife, **Amy Jo Carlton White**, and two daughters, **Hannah and Lauren**.

Melba Tingle, 88, finished her earthly race on December 21, 2019. Sister Melba was a member of the church in **Pleasant Hill, IA**. She leaves behind three children and many



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grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, as well as her church family.

Roberta "Bobbi" Duckstein, 86, went to be with Jesus on December 23, 2019. Sister Bobbi became a Christian at the age of fourteen and remained faithful until death as a member of the church in **Vandalia, IA**.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Special Meetings

The church in **Section Church of Christ, Osage City, KS** plans a special weekend meeting for **March 21-22, 2020**. More information will follow in future months.

As was reported in previous issues, the church which meets on **Dean Avenue, Des Moines, IA** will no longer be holding their annual weekend meeting. Our readers may recall this meeting was held the traditional weekend of Easter. The church in **Martensdale, IA** has decided to hold a meeting to take the place of the Dean Avenue meeting. However, the meeting will be held the fourth weekend in March instead of Easter weekend beginning in 2020. The church will also host the meeting at a community center in the nearby town of **Indianola, IA**. More information about the meeting can be found at:

<http://martensdalechurchofchrist.org/index.php/about-us/spring-meeting-2020>

Your editor received an update on arrangements for the **2020 Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO**. Here are the 2020 call-in dates:

1. March 3 -- Campsites with Electric, Sewer, and Water
2. March 5 -- Campsites with Electric and Water
3. March 9 -- Any remaining campsites

Discovery Ministries requires a \$50, non-refundable deposit per campsite. Campsites become available on Friday, June 26. Lodge rooms become available at 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, June

27. This and all additional information can be found at the **Prince Road Church of Christ** website:

<http://princeroadchurchofchrist.org/campout/>

2020 Meetings

March 21-22.....Section Church of Christ (Osage City, KS)

March 28-29.....Martensdale, IA

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

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